

Organizing as Patriots

When colonial legislatures opposed British policies, many governors simply dissolved those assemblies. Unofficial groups such as local committees, county-wide conventions, and congresses quickly became central to patriot organizing. They relied on economic networks that included “middling” farmers, traders, artisans, working men, and free women to create a new political movement.

The inclusive nature of the movement seemed to show that ordinary free people were capable of having a stronger voice in politics.



Detail from "The Alternative of Williamsburg," by Phillip Dawe, 1775

Courtesy of Library of Congress <<https://www.loc.gov/item/97514624/>>

Social Networks

Sons of Liberty organized around existing social networks and organizations, such as firefighting companies. The movement relied on ideas and practices of common participation learned in such community groups. This leather bucket belonged to Samuel Allyne Otis, a merchant and patriot from

Barnstable, Massachusetts. The Latin motto on the bucket translates to “Friendship in Times of Distress.”



Fire bucket, "Saml. A. Otis / 1775"
Gift of CIGNA Museum and Art Collection

Boycotts and Home Manufacturing

Patriots created new economic networks by forming agreements not to use imported British commodities, such as fine fabrics, furnishings, or tea. They hoped to influence British merchants and manufacturers and also to bridge social divisions among Americans. Free people of nearly any class could join and enforce an association. To join, the wealthy put aside imported styles to buy plainer products from their neighbors—linen spun by colonial women and woven by colonial weavers; gloves made by colonial glovers, tanners, and farmers; and herbal brews sold by country people to replace tea.



Flax wheel, Rhode Island, 18th century

Facing Down a Great Corporation

The East India Company was the wealthiest private corporation of the day. Parliament gave its stockholders a bailout by giving the company a monopoly on the colonial tea trade in 1773. They also kept a tax on the tea. Patriots in nearly every colony blocked sale of the tea, either reshipping it back to England or forcibly storing it in locked warehouses. Boston was the first city to destroy East India Company tea, in December 1773. This creamer reminded tea drinkers not to indulge. Its inscription reads “Britons take back your baneful tea/You N’er shall make a slave of me.”



Tea boycott silver creamer



"The Destruction of Tea at Boston Harbor," New York, around 1846

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Militias

Colonial laws required free men of all classes to serve in local militias. Militias were critical in times of armed conflict but often lapsed during peacetime. In the long term—eight years of Revolutionary War—Americans would depend on a professional Continental Army. In the short term, militia service helped defend the colonies and also create a sense of common sacrifice.



Powder horn made and used by minuteman Daniel Higbe, Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1775

[View object record </collections/nmah_408943>](#)



Richard Wilson Brown Bess musket, 1761

British musket left after in the colonies from the French and Indian War and later used by patriot forces
Gift of Adriana Scalamandre Bitter and Edwin Ward Bitter for the Bitter Family Collection

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Hours & Admission

Open every day, except December 25, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Admission is free and no tickets are required.

Location & Contact

1300 Constitution Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20560 <<https://www.google.com/maps/place/smithsonian+national+museum+of+american+history/@38.8912835,-77.0322449,17z>>

Contact Information </about/contact>

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